

Lone Star imPRESSions



A History of Small Press in Texas

An Exhibit Catalog By Mitch William Cota

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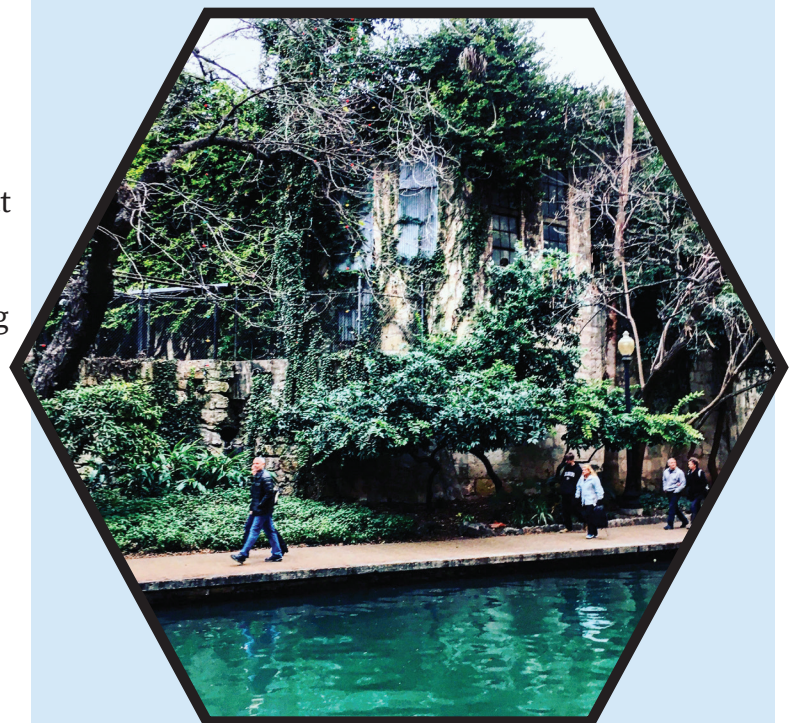
“Lone Star imPRESSions, A History of Small Press in Texas” is an exhibit about the history of small press in Austin, San Antonio, and Houston. There are long standing presses like Slough Press and Wings Press, while there exists a group of newcomers that have hit the scene in the last ten years like Raw Paw, Awst, and Smoking Glue Gun. The consensus between all groups researched and interviewed was this- each wanted to provide a safe space for underrepresented and unheard voices in poetry, fiction, and art. More often than not, the distinction between these different forms is blurred in these publications. The small presses in these cities have a dedication to creativity and those who desire to tell stories, hear new voices, and produce work that is fresh and original. It is no wonder that so many of the small presses in Texas and their authors have gained so much attention on a national level.

Before we can begin to examine the history of small press in Texas, it is necessary to define what I mean by the term “small press.” There are many different types of small presses and university presses are one type. There are small presses that have been bought by larger publishing houses, yet are still considered small press but for this exhibit, I wanted to be somewhat of a purist. This exhibit defines small press as a one functioning outside of a university, as universities often have substantially less funding concerns, and presses that are functioning outside of large publishing houses. We wanted to examine small presses that were in the truest sense, self-started and self-sustained. Presses that started with nothing but an application for a LLC and dream of publishing something that was different from mainstream publishing. A press created by individuals for individuals.

The exhibit examines each press for its place in the history, what type of voices it seeks out to publish, how they have secured distribution and printing costs on low budgets, and what drives the creation of these presses in Texas. Not all of the presses in the exhibit are from Texas; some

started in Texas and moved out, some started in other locations and came to find Texas as their home, and some are Texan born and bred. Regardless of origin, the common thread that runs through each story is the drive to push against mainstream print culture, and the idea that someone can create something without an academic background in writing and literature. A good amount of the presses are started by individuals without college degrees, or degrees in subjects that are not related to publishing and writing. There is a firm belief that creativity and good work can be found anywhere, with a little searching and some guidance on the publisher’s part.

Much of this work exists outside commonly held paradigms of genre and format as well. The previous constructed ideas we have of poetry, art, zines, and artist books are mixing and changing as the publishing world evolves. A poet now makes chapbooks with illustrations. A zine includes poetry. An artist book is a work of art but also includes poetry. A writer would prefer to call their work poetry prose, instead of just poetry, or the opposite. The point is that the lines are blurred. Drawing distinctions is really only for the value of classification and cataloging. These new works are breaking boundaries and crossing genre lines. They are making the kind of work that small press set out to publish.



Each creator works in different formats and genres, whether that means fiction, poetry, slam poetry, illustration, art, zines, or more often than not a mixture of all the above. These presses solve complex problems that large publishing houses cannot. What does one do with a poet artist? Small presses answer would be, let them create and we will publish the end product. It is cliché to say that these small presses specialize in that which defies definition, but it is an apt statement. Each publisher is not in this for the money, they are publishing because they believe in what they are creating, and what they are producing. Small press is the last battlefield for work untainted by the constraints and influence of traditional publishing houses.

There may be a lot of stereotypes and assumptions about Texas, but one thing is for certain, small press is alive and well. Out of the hundreds of small presses to choose from, this exhibit has chosen some of the oldies but goodies, the fresh on the scene, and those that work in the downright bizarre. Each has left a mark on the publishing scene here in Texas; whether it is due to the talent they have published, their original content, or the owners themselves being larger than life. So, though this is not a complete history of the small press in Texas, it is definitely a window into some of the longest running and most interesting presses today.

Before we dive in to the presses and the poets, I wanted to take a look at the methodology that drove the exhibit.

methods to the madness

It is uncommon inside exhibit catalogs to discuss or explain the methodology with which the research was obtained, but in the case of this exhibit, I wanted the audience to know where I found my information. Small press is very much about people and their voices. I want to assure the audience that I will do my utmost best to withhold myself from the commentary. These are stories told by the publishers themselves.

The research conducted for this exhibit is



part interviews with the publishers, part archival research, and part online and social media presence. The small presses selected for interviews were based on Gina Bastone's connections, a humanities librarian at the Perry-Castañeda Library, and then any subsequent connections that were made through each interview. Some were conducted in person, some over the phone, and some through email. The standard list of questions for the interview were intentionally left short. We wanted to know when the press started, where the founders were from, and how they came to the idea of starting their own small press, but the rest of the interview questions were tailored to what the small press wanted to provide me; the story that they were trying to tell.

The decision to conduct each interview in a different manner was made solely on each editor's preference and schedule. Since they were helping me with the exhibit, I wanted the tax on their time to be minimal. The goal of the interviews was not to gain a qualitative perspective on small press but to record something similar to an oral history. I wanted to give each small press the opportunity to tell their story in their own words. Upon initial research, it was astonishingly clear that there were far too many small presses in the history of Texas to do a comprehensive history, and due to their low budgets and small operating staff, most small

presses that are defunct did not donate their papers to an archive. By allowing the publishers to tell their own story, it allowed for their stories to guide the themes of the exhibit organically instead of my bias coloring the themes.

Since not all papers were preserved, it would be quite impossible to compose a complete history. Texas does publish directories of the different publishers that are housed in the state, but even these directories are subject to each of the presses having a LLC. If the small press was relatively new or went defunct relatively quickly, there is not always a LLC. So these directories are not comprehensive either. Due to all these factors, I approached the exhibit by finding the owners or editors of the popular and longstanding small presses, and found those papers and manuscripts located in the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History and the Austin History Center. The archives did not always have a complete set of manuscripts and papers from each press or individual as well. So, I took what information they did have, and tried to piece together a narrative that is as close to reality as possible.

The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History had limited papers often cataloged under the owner/editor, not the name of the press. This became increasingly difficult if they were not a popular or long standing small press. For this reason, I decided to focus on the small presses

I could find, and those that were popular. The Austin History Center had subject guides for all their materials related to publishing and presses, but each file was incomplete and was composed of memorabilia and marketing from each press.

With all these factors in mind, I pushed forward with the idea to have the publishers of stories tell their own story. An exhibit about the history of small press in Texas, but a grassroots history just like the presses themselves. It may be a little messy and a little eccentric, but it is as close to the truth as we could get.

meet the press

The exhibit examines both small presses and the poets and authors who drove their creation and content. Some are long standing institutions, while others are fresh creations looking to break new ground. Both have a commitment to unique stories and voices. The small press community in Texas cares more about collaboration than competition, diverse voices over the status quo, and original and fresh work over trends and marketing. Here are some of the presses that make up the San Antonio, Austin, and Houston small press communities.

SLOUGH PRESS

One of the longest standing small presses in Austin, Texas is Slough Press. Slough Press is the creation of Chuck Taylor and Susan Bright. Chuck Taylor took on the press solo when he moved to El Paso to teach for University of Texas at El Paso. Susan Bright went on to found another small press, Plain View Press, after leaving Slough. In Taylor's words, "It was the 70s but the 60s in spirit." He wanted Slough Press to contribute to a "change of consciousness" he felt was well underway at that time (personal communication, 2017). Before he created Slough, he had an academic career with a PhD in English Renaissance Literature, but the creation of the press was a transition for Taylor to move from academics to becoming a writer.

Slough Press was Taylor's first foray into publishing, and it is evident that he has a knack





for it. The press was created in 1973 and is still publishing work today. Taylor knew that small presses were not known for making their owners rich, and he admittedly put family and his own writing first. The fact does not change that Slough Press has paid for itself financially. A lot of the small presses we will examine function under very similar assumptions and realistic expectations. They are not in it for the money, they are in it for the content. It was these realistic expectations which have allowed the press to stay afloat while so many other presses have gone under. The other reason is Taylor's ability to adapt with changing times.

Slough Press originally used to photocopy chapbooks and staple bind them. As business progressed, they were able to partner with many different printing companies outside of Texas. As times changed, technology drove printing presses out by offering print on demand services through companies like Amazon and CreateSpace. The self-publishing world has grown tenfold in the dawn of the digital world, and Slough Press is able to keep up with the times by now offering their books through print-on-demand services. This eliminates the need for distribution and printing contracts that other presses had to battle in the past.

The most important trait of Slough Press is its commitment to those writing on the margins. Slough was specifically known for publishing Chicana and Cajun authors, and paid a large

focus on publishing authors whose writing is accessible. Besides Chicana and Cajun authors, Slough also has a large offering of female writers, which in the time of its inception were missing in the publishing world. Overall, Slough Press has created a long standing tradition of hard work and a commitment to providing underrepresented voices a platform to be heard.

Slough Press has open submissions [here](#)

RAW PAW Press

A newer press on the Austin, Texas scene is Raw Paw Press. Founded in 2010 by Chris Dock and Will Kavber, Raw Paw Press was dedicated to producing zines named Raw Paw, a printing press for apparel and accessories, and representation for art in Austin. In speaking with both founders, Raw Paw came about by a desire to be creative and produce work that was free to the public. The form that creativity took was less of a concern for both of them. Raw Paw has produced vinyl records, books, chapbooks, zines, apparel, and many other items. The way the founders see it, if they see good work being done they will help the creator see its fruition. For this reason, they have had the opportunity to work with artists, illustrators, poets, writers, and musicians from different backgrounds and generations like David Jewell, Kate Pitkin, Ric Williams, Corduroi, Sean Morgan, and many more.

With Raw Paw's taste for variety, it is hard to pin them down stylistically. The press uses a risograph to print comics with a distinctly vintage feel and other quality printing such as perfect binding and die cut covers which its small press zines and chapbooks apart from others in Texas. Their most recent book 52 Card Pickup written by David Jewell and Ric Williams is a mixture of illustration and poetry. Though if you asked David Jewell, he is not so quick to call it poetry. It is another work of mixed format and genre. The

first printing was done on an actual set of playing cards. It is hard to label poetry, art, and playing cards, but that is exactly the kind of work that Raw Paw Press prides themselves in. They find work that is different and pushes the limits, work that defies categorization.

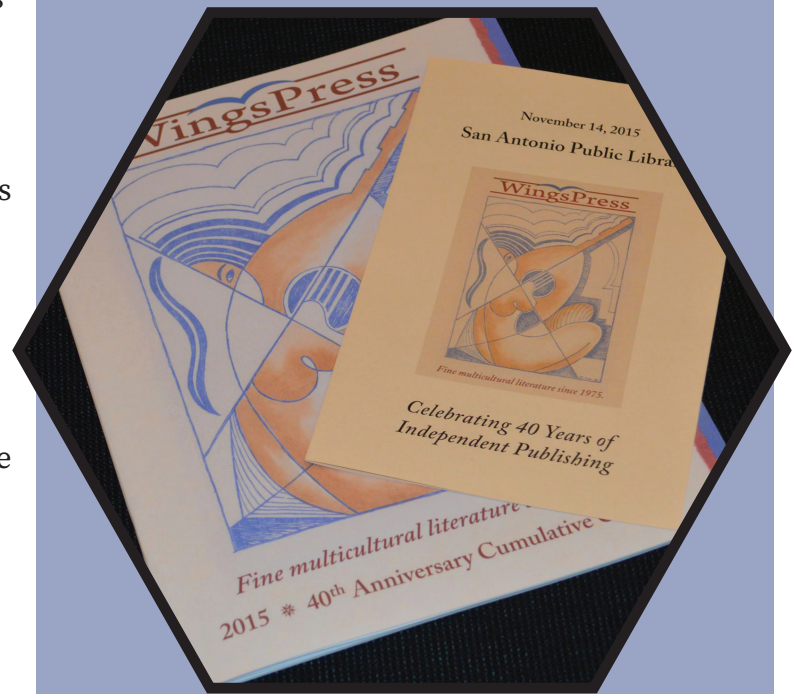
When Raw Paw was a new small press, Kavber was making music and writing poetry. As he was trying to get the press off the ground, he met Chris Dock. Chris was a fresh graduate from the University of Texas at Austin with a degree in design. The pairing could not have been more perfect. Once Dock was on board, Raw Paw Press hit the ground running with a new designer with the chops to really push the content. In order to produce the work they do though, it takes funding and Raw Paw Press tried different approaches.

Initially, Raw Paw Press was about providing free content and fostering creativity in the Austin community. Realistically, they were creating content out-of-pocket and acting as a patron to the arts. They moved to a model where they are able to recoup a portion of the costs from the authors themselves. Raw Paw participates in print-on-demand services like most small presses today. They handle distribution of books they print, like the comics and illustrations printed on their risograph and print-on-demand handles the rest. It is the perfect hybrid model between pre-internet days and the digital world today. It is rare for a small press to have something like a risograph at their disposal, so this is another way Raw Paw is able to set itself apart from other small presses in Texas.

Raw Paw does not have a specialty regarding voices they seek, but they do believe in underrepresented authors making work in the way those authors see fit. By taking a hands-off approach and allowing these authors freedom, they are not unduly influencing the work with their own personal opinions and biases. This approach is unseen in large press. Dock and Kavber have a commitment to great work and design, and they guide their authors and creators in any way they are able to. They realize that some stories need to come directly from the

source.

Raw Paw Press is committed to untold stories. They are preparing for a large brand relaunch in 2017. After working on their business model and diversifying their product, they are ready to hit the market with creativity the publishing community has never seen before.



WINGS PRESS

Wings Press is another example of a long-running small press. They have been publishing since 1975 originally in Houston, with Joseph Lomax and Joanie Whitebird as its founders. Whitebird started publishing originally because, just like Chuck Taylor, she saw an opportunity to start producing work that was not getting made by large publishing houses. Lomax had his own printing press which allowed for Wings to produce its own work with a relatively lower cost than a lot of its counterparts. Whitebird was not just active with her small press, she was also active in the entire publishing community nationally as Wings grew.

Whitebird was active in the creation of COSMEP (Committee of Small Magazine Editors and Publishers), and also an active member in WIP (Western Independent Publishers). The commitment Whitebird and Lomax had to poetry

and literature was seen in their support of the community, other small presses, and authors all over the United States. One of the reasons that Wings has a larger offering is their drive to diversify beyond local authors. That is not to say local authors were not important, but Wings prided itself on publishing good work regardless of where it was from. These connections inside of the publishing world allowed for Whitebird to meet and publish more authors from all over; proving to be a very different approach since most small press in Texas at this time was focused on Texas or the Southwest. Whitebird saw the importance in providing women, people of color, and anyone else from diverse backgrounds the opportunity to be heard through their writing. As time progressed, so did Wings with a new chief editor.

In 1995, Whitebird was having health problems. Something she had become accustomed to as time passed. She decided to sell the press to Bryce Milligan so that it could still receive the amount of attention it deserved from another talented author. At this time, Wings moved from Houston to San Antonio, which is Milligan's home and the current headquarters of Wings Press today. Milligan had a career as an author and poet prior to Wings Press, and since he has taken over as Chief Editor, there have been multiple books added to his body of work. Under Milligan, Wings first title to be published was "Promiscuous Light." This showed Milligan's commitment to Whitebird's vision. The title was an anthology of young women poets all under the age of 25 and locals of San Antonio. Besides publishing female authors and poets, Wings has been considered a "discovery press." This means that it prides itself on finding new writers and new work. In addition to Wings commitment to the writers, the special editions it has produced are nothing short of beautiful.

Wings, like so many other small presses, takes pride in the editions it produces. They release special editions with Japanese stab bindings, books with ephemera inside like an artist book, and of course the classic limited first edition runs with author signature. They utilize print-on-demand services as well. Wings functions

like the small presses within the exhibit, just on a larger scale. Their longevity, commitment to staying a "discovery press," and willingness to publish outside the Texas and Southwest locale is what has secured their spot as one of the longest running small presses in Texas. Joanie Whitebird's papers can be found at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History. They are a mix of her personal papers with Wings Press documents and manuscripts.

Wings Press has open submissions [here](#)



LIT CITY PRESS

Lit City Press is the love child that grew out of a recurring event called Chicon Street Poets in Austin, Texas started by G. F. Harper. To talk about Lit City Press without talking about Chicon Street Poets would be doing it a disservice, since the press grew out of the event. G. F. Harper wanted to return back to the days in Austin when poets like Albert Huffstickler, the original "Bard of Hyde Park," and David Jewell were hanging out at Quack's. Harper felt that in these times, poetry was always a stone's throw away. He remembers his time getting his degree in Austin where he and friends would visit local bars and coffee shops for poetry readings on a regular basis. Slowly those readings became fewer and fewer

until Harper looked around, now graduated and in the workforce, to see that poetry was hard to find.

So Harper decided to do something about it. He began a regular event in 2014 at Dozen Street in Austin where he would get poets to read. It started with local poets and slowly grew to include some national poets like Samira Noorali. As it has grown, Chicon Street Poets now has its official classification as a non-profit, and the creation of Lit City Press was not far behind. Harper's intentions were to create a literary community again that included authors, poets, slam poets, and any other form of writing people in Austin wanted to produce. Lit City Press does not have a direct focus on what it attempts to publish other than original voices and good writing. How Harper accomplishes this is through a lot of the means we have discussed previously. He utilizes the print-on-demand services of CreateSpace in order to bypass making manufacturing and distribution deals. This route is very common in today's publishing world as it allows small press owners to keep costs low in order to produce more work.

Lit City is relatively young in the small press scene in Austin and in overall Texas, but it is quickly making a name for itself with its all-inclusive attitude and drive to merge the worlds between page poets and stage poets. Harper sees a division between slam poets and spoken words poets that he wants to unify. He believes that slam poets could truly benefit from more of a presence in the small press, publishing books. He likewise believes that spoken word or page poets, could benefit from the showmanship of the stage and what slam poets have to offer. It is through this unifying of forces that small press will begin to see more diverse offerings and break new ground. Lit City Press is on its way up with a strong business model and an owner who believes in good work. The marriage between the regular events of the non-profit Chicon Street Poets and the publishing presence of Lit City Press give this small press a whole new dimension that is all its own.

Lit City Press has open submissions [here](#)

TIMBER MOUSE PUBLISHING

Timber Mouse Publishing is a small press that was founded in Austin, Texas by Kevin W. Burke. Burke is garnering national attention and has won awards like the 2011 Southwest Shootout Individual Slam Champion and the 2013 Texas Grand Slam Poetry Festival Champion among others. Originally from Chicago, Illinois, he moved to Austin during one of the hottest summers on record after being laid off from work. Burke self-admittedly really was not a fan of poetry. While in college, his degree was in creative writing and the pretension he found did not attract him to poetry. It was not until he began getting into hip hop through artists like Sage Francis that he discovered this underground scene of slam poetry. After starting to dig in deeper, finding spoken word artists and overall fantastic writing, he began to find his true love of poetry.

Burke founded Timber Mouse in 2011 with Bill Moran. Moran had to back down from running the press with Burke as his own life became busier. Timber Mouse was different than some of its counterparts because it focused on



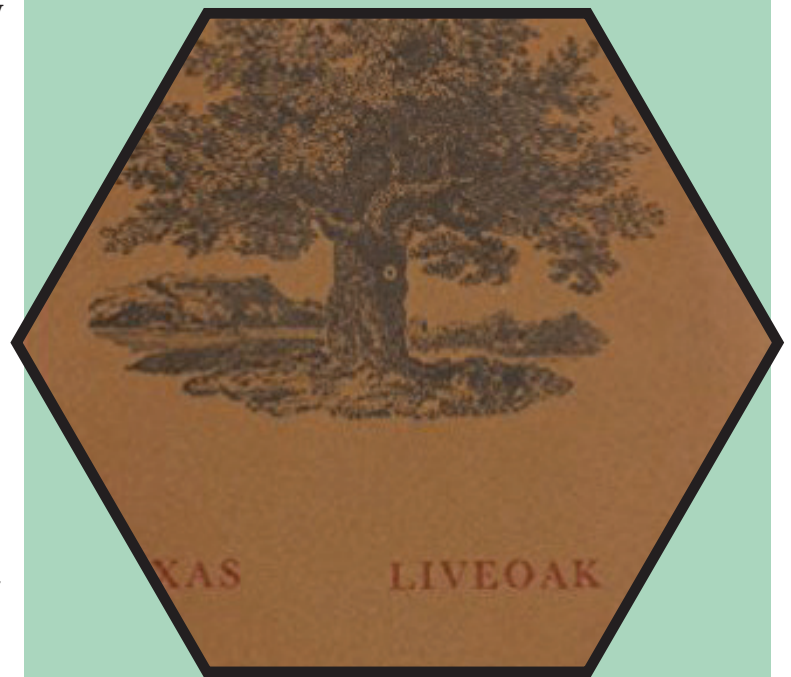
slam poetry. It had established itself to solve the problem of getting stage poets to start publishing. He began to meet different small presses of the time through an article written in

the Austin Chronicle, which at the time had Wayne Brenner as its Arts Listings Editor, and still does to this day. Brenner's commitment to the small press community, zine culture, and theater has driven the community through his actions and his words, with Burke being a testament to this. He credits small press, poetry, and the literary community with saving his life. This can be seen in the fact that Timber Mouse Publishing is one of the few presses to support itself without losing any money.

One of the influences that Burke credits Timber Mouse Publishing model to is Write Bloody Press whose founder is Derrick Brown. Write Bloody is another small press that was previously headquartered in Austin and now resides in California. They are also garnering national attention, with a profile done on the publishing company by the New York Times. Write Bloody and A Strange Object, both of Austin origin, have been credited as keeping the world of small press alive. Timber Mouse's publishing model provides the books to the author at a discounted price which then the author takes responsibility for selling the copies as they travel around the U.S. They also utilize print-on-demand services, and the Perry-Castañeda Library has just recently purchased "They Rewrote Themselves Legendary" by Ronnie K. Stephens, which can be found in the University of Texas Poetry Center along with all of Timber Mouse's books.

Burke's personal style of slam poetry is influenced by punk rock, as was the original poetry scene back in the Hyde Park days according to David Jewell, but Timber Mouse Publishing is about finding unique voices that have something original to offer without limiting itself to a specific genre of slam poetry. When discussing the difference between slam poetry and spoken word, he does not see a difference. Burke says that spoken word only becomes slam poetry when in a competition, otherwise it is all spoken word. There are no longer distinct lines drawn between slam poets and poets who write. He sees the worlds as overlapping and evolving. The only distinction to be drawn is in the competition aspect, otherwise Burke says, "Poetry is poetry."

Burke runs his publishing company in a similar business model to a record company. This idea was something he got from mentor Derrick Brown and Write Bloody Publishing. It would appear that this business model is different and offers its poets a new approach to getting their work out into the world. Timber Mouse Publishing appears to have a strong future with its incorporation of new and old distribution practices, its innovative ideas, and a focus on slam poetry.



THORP SPRINGS PRESS

Thorp Springs Press was founded in 1971 by John Paul Foreman. He was originally from Granbury, Texas, but started the small press after he completed his degree at Berkeley in California. Just like Chuck Taylor and Joanie Whitebird, he saw a gap in what was being published. Thorp Springs Press had a focus on poetry from Southwest writers. In 1978 he served as a chairman of the board for COSMEP (Committee of Small Magazine Editors and Publishers) where

he had interactions with Whitebird. In 1978 he published “Travois: An Anthology of Texas Poets” with Whitebird while she was still in Houston, Texas. The literary community in this day was overlapping just as it is today where poets, writers, and artists all collaborated. During this year he also moved back to Austin, and continued to run Thorp Springs Press.

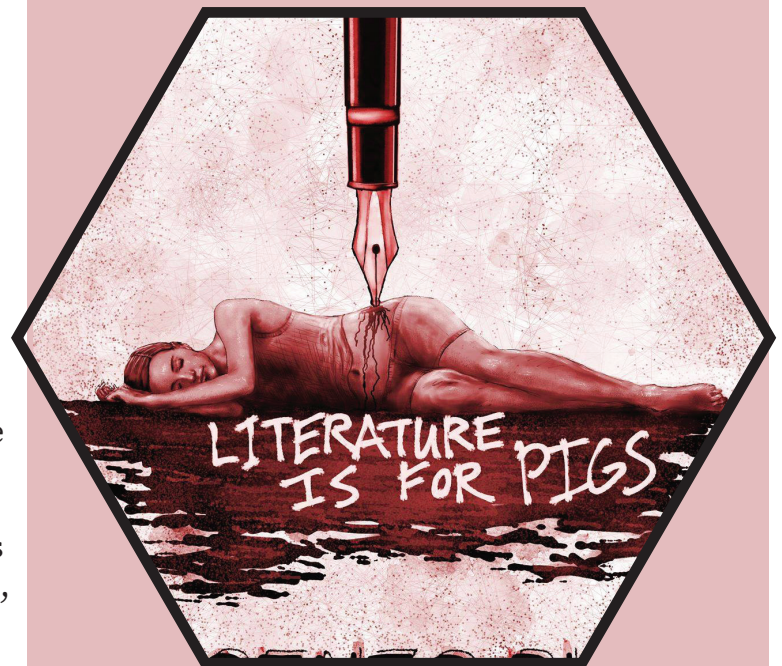
He had originally printed by hand with his own printing press, as was common in this time, but once he moved back to Texas he ceased printing his books by hand. Foreman began a bookshop to create a space for writers, artists, and intellectuals to gather in a welcoming environment. It was called Brazos Book Shop, where he also had an art gallery. Just as Foreman had imagined once he created the space, the community of artists and writers began to drift in and call it home. Foreman was not solely content with the publishing world or book sales, he achieved much more in his lifetime.

Foreman began establishing a literary community in Austin, but he did so on a political level as well. In 1982, he lobbied to have the Texas Poet Laureateship established, then in 2006 ran as a Democrat for U.S. Congress from the tenth Texas district. These are of course the highlights of Foreman’s accomplishments. His achievements can be seen all over the history of Austin through the different leagues, commissions, and circuits he was able to establish for the arts and literary community. Foreman continued with his small press, and received widespread success both locally and nationally. He published his own work like so many founders do, but he was able to publish the work of Texas natives, giving them a voice on a national level that was so rarely heard. Foreman may not have the same nostalgia built around his name as people like Albert Huffstickler in Austin, but there is no way to deny that a lot of the small presses today owe their humble beginnings to this man and his vision of a literary community that was supported in Texas both creatively and politically.

Thorp Springs Press had an original focus to provide a platform for unpublished writers to

get their work seen when it began in California. Foreman focused on Poetry, Fiction, and drama. Thorp Springs took open submissions from anyone who wanted to provide their work for publish, but Foreman also courted larger names around the country whom he knew could garner attention both for themselves and his small press if he were given the opportunity to publish their work. Once Foreman moved back to Texas, he truly was always a champion of Texas writers and their abilities. This can be seen through all his work on a local and national level in creating programs and groups to support the literary community of Texas. Foreman was able to accomplish all of this with his press even as he was being denied non-profit status. This did not deter him as Thorp Springs managed to function as a small press for two decades in Texas. After publishing almost 100 books and journals, Thorp Springs Press and Foreman’s Brazos Book Shop both closed their doors in the early 1990s.

Foreman passed in December of 2012, and his presence was and is sorely missed in the Austin community. His archival papers can be found at the Harry Ransom Center.



PERPETUAL MOTION MACHINE PUBLISHING

Perpetual Motion Machine Publish was founded by Max Booth III and Lori Michelle in 2012 out of San Antonio, Texas. Like so many other small

presses, Booth and Michelle have a passion for the underdogs, and this is where they have derived the name of their press. A perpetual motion machine is “a hypothetical machine that can do work indefinitely without an energy source” (personal communication, 2017). A machine that is impossible, but Booth and Michelle love to believe in the impossible. Booth is from Northern Indiana, while Michelle is from La Habra, a small town east of Los Angeles. Both had their beginnings in publishing as editors of different magazines until their paths crossed at Dark Moon Digest. They saw a hole in what was being published for indie fiction, and like so many of our other small presses, they sought out to correct that deficiency.

Perpetual Motion Machine Publishing specializes in indie fiction, specifically those in the horror, science fiction, and crime genres. Not only have they started their own small press, they have been able to in time purchase the Dark Moon Digest from the original owner, Stan Swanson. Each continues to do work on the side within the community as well. Michelle has been deemed, “the queen of indie horror formatting.” A title that is not soon to be rivaled when compared to the content other small presses are producing in Texas. Perpetual Motion Machine may be satisfying a special niche, but they are doing it by themselves and well.

When it comes to distributing and manufacturing, Perpetual Motion Machine Publishing utilizes similar resources as other small presses. For their print on demand, they use Lightning Source and IngramSpark as their print on demand service and distribution. In terms of other small presses in San Antonio, Perpetual Motion Machine has not interacted very much within the community. While they have collaborated with a few small presses, their community is the indie horror community, which according to Michelle is very close knit. Just like the Austin community, the San Antonio indie horror community would help each other in any way. There are hurdles that the press faces though.

Perpetual Motion Machine Publishing is

another self sufficient small press like Timber Mouse Publishing. This in and of itself is a huge accomplishment. Though Michelle and Booth both say that time, money, and energy are the largest drains, the press supports itself in terms of finances. Both Booth and Michelle still work other jobs. Like so many other Chief Editors, they hope that one day Perpetual Motion Machine Publishing will be able to support them as well, but they also have realistic expectations that the publishing company may never reach that point. Regardless, Michelle and Booth both continue to work because they have a passion for what they do. They saw a deficiency and corrected it. They found a community that was going unsupported in San Antonio and fixed it. Michelle and Booth publish the books they would like to read, and they are lucky enough that an entire community sees value in their books and the magazine. Perpetual Motion Machine Press has accomplished the impossible, they are a well-oiled machine that seems to run itself. Both editors have had an extensive history in press and work hard daily to make sure their small press is a success.

PMMP has open submissions [here](#)



SMOKING GLUE GUN

Smoking Glue Gun is one of our small presses in the exhibit that did not start in Texas, but now calls Austin home. Smoking Glue Gun started in Louisiana with Taylor and Blake Lee Pate as the

editors-in-chief. Initially they published friend's work alongside more well known authors around and outside of Louisiana. Smoking Glue Gun did not begin with any real dedication to a geographic location so much as a dedication to a specific type of work. They are a small press that is consistently pushing the envelope with format



and genre. The Pates have a dedication to feminist literature, transgender writers and artists. Beyond their drive to publish from communities that often do not get attention, they also push the format of their offerings. Smoking Glue Gun is not limited to literary undertakings, they also have a very large art base as well. They have published chapbooks and images of sculptures. Smoking Glue Gun has two different outlets to publish like Perpetual Motion Machine Publishing.

Smoking Glue Gun consists of a magazine that is published in volumes with different writers and artists for each issue. Due to their broad scope of submissions and work, the magazine includes art, poetry, fiction, and a mixture of all of the above. They save their chapbook series for the more specific genre of poetry. They do not limit the definition of poetry either though. These chapbooks have beautiful cover art. What others may see as dividing lines, the Pates see as a palette that can be worked in a myriad of ways. They care more about giving voices to those who are silenced rather than abiding by

any set of rules. Smoking Glue Gun continues to encourage, “submissions from female-identified, non-binary & queer artists, artists of color, artists with disabilities, and marginalized artists.” The Pates are by definition the reason small presses have existed so prolifically. They are correcting the gap they saw in publishing. They also have taken a completely digital approach to how they run their press.

Smoking Glue Gun has crowd-funded their original chapbooks, created by visual artists. They were able to participate with the Pates in promoting the crowdfunding campaign. These campaigns were a huge success but that was not without a large amount of work on the artists and editor's part. After they experienced the amount of work the crowdfunding campaign took, they decided to regroup and also fund the press and magazine through grants and working to be classified as a non-profit. Like a lot of the small presses we have discussed up to this point, the editors still absorbed a good amount of the cost, but they made the money back by getting the commitment from an audience prior to the publishing of the chapbooks. Smoking Glue Gun takes a very realistic approach to their publishing schedule as well. They planned the release of their first four chapbooks over a three year period to ensure no money was lost.

The press also utilizes print on demand and digital publishing like so many presses of today do. The magazines themselves are digitally published while the chapbooks are print on demand. Not to sound cliché, but they saw the new era of self-publishing and ran with it. The difference between Smoking Glue Gun and so many other failed ventures is the press' commitment to original and different content. They publish quality material from communities that are underrepresented, and that commitment shows in their content. Plays that are written in poetic form, art that is paired with word, and minimalist designs, the Pates want all of the work they publish to push the limits, to break the mold of what large publishing houses will not take on. Both Taylor and Blake Lee received their master of Fine Arts from the University of Texas at Austin as part of the New Writer's Project. Even

with their traditional academic backgrounds, they have a radical take on art, writing, poetry, and anything that falls in between looks like.

As for the Austin, Texas small press community, Smoking Glue Gun and the Pates have experienced nothing but the warmest of welcomes from other small presses of the area. They have not had the opportunity to collaborate with other small presses quite yet, but they continue to receive encouragement from others in the community. They may not have started in Texas, but Austin has its pull for the creatively inclined and Smoking Glue Gun has found its home here. In a community that rejects hard rules, accepts literary endeavors, and encourages genre bending, there was truly no other place in the U.S. that houses this type of work. Taylor Pate also works for Malvern Books and Host Publications which is another small press in Austin, Texas. They are a long standing institution both as a bookstore and press. While the bookstore has a large commitment to local writers, Host publishes authors from all over the world. Smoking Glue Gun is in good company when it comes to what other small presses they have had the opportunity to interact with. As the Pates look forward, we can expect to see more work that is the likes of something we have never seen before.

Smoking Glue Gun has open submission [here](#)



WEASEL PRESS

In Weasel's words, the press is searching for, "fearless punks, broken lovers, bruised poets, fiery activists, dedicated storytellers and much, much more" (Weasel, 2017). Most of Weasel's work itself has been published through other small presses outside of Weasel and Red Ferret Press. Weasel Press was founded by a poet named Weasel himself in Houston. They started as a magazine called "Vagabonds: Anthology of the Mad Ones." As the magazine began to get traction, Weasel Press was not far behind to begin accepting submissions and publishing work that they saw as distinctly indie beat literature. Beat literature is a literary movement that happened post World War II with notable authors like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. That is their specialty, and there are no restrictions on format or genre, but they are looking for real stories by real people. Weasel the editor has a bachelor of arts degree in literature from the University of Houston, and is a Houston native. He has seen nothing but love when interacting with the Houston small press community. Once Weasel Press took off, it provided a platform to make more connections within the community, and as Weasel says, they help each other out whenever they can. The press started with him as the sole owner and employee, but they have had the opportunity to grow and hire more editors. As Weasel says, "We just keep growing!" (personal communication, 2017)

When it comes to manufacturing and distribution, he uses the same options as Perpetual Motion Machine Publishing-Lightning Source and IngramSpark. With the ability to self-publish so easily today, these print on demand services make it easier for small presses like Weasel Press to stay alive and keep costs low. Technology has really started to level the playing field in publishing. Weasel is committed to quality writing, and ease of publishing forces the large publishing houses to relinquish some of their power. Community and original writing is far more important to Weasel than money and competition. The sense of community in Houston is strong within small press, writers, and poets. Weasel Press has not

had an opportunity to collaborate with any other small presses, but Weasel says he is not opposed to the idea. He has been trading some work with another small press out of Nashville, Tennessee named Thurston Howl Publications. Just like Harper from Lit City Press, Weasel is more concerned with creating a literary community in Houston than strictly publishing work.

Weasel owns another small press which has grown out of it for a specific type of writing and work. The press is called Red Ferret Press, and focus on sex, plain and simple. They are not seeking out garden variety romance and erotica, but they are looking for well-written erotica about everyday people. You can see the similarities between Weasel Press and Red Ferret Press. They have a focus on content that is relatable to everyday people, and content that is about bringing different types of communities together of shared interests. Though Weasel Press is distinctly beat publishing, Red Ferret Publishing is strictly for erotica. It would appear that it is more important to Weasel to keep these communities together than to keep his publishing houses name on everything, which shows the dedication small press' have to their work and writers. This shows his dedication to his vision and what each of these presses stand for. Weasel Press just may be the next big thing to come out of Houston small press since Wings Press. You can see that he has found exactly what he is looking for through the Weasel Press books that have been published.

Weasel Press has open submissions [here](#)

AWST PRESS

“Welsh for august—the month the press was founded. au-gust (ô'gəst/) adjective. Respected and impressive” (awst.com, 2017). Awst press was founded by Tatiana Ryckman and Wendy Walker in August of 2014. It is one of the few small presses on our list that is female owned and led. The focus of Awst is on literary content, and I choose my words wisely in using the term literary. The focus of their content is to provide a platform for diverse voices but not for young adult literature or indie horror, it is for elevated



literature. Now they are by no means attempting to discount the other genres or forms, this is just a testament to the level of scrutiny they hold their content to. Awst believes that there is “room at the table” for everyone, and they have no desire to maintain an air of being “taste makers.” For this reason, they focus on delivering work with diverse perspectives and voices.

Tatiana Ryckman has published her own work, though not through her small press which is a bit different from some of the other presses we have examined so far. She prides herself on running the press as a separate entity without using it as a platform to simply publish her own work. It is for this reason when I asked, “do you recognize any difference in being a woman in the publishing world?” A silly question I know, I needed to ask the question. Awst is one of the only presses I had the opportunity to interview that was female led. Her response was not dismissive but was more concerned with the actual work than who it came from. She is a member of VIDA (a women in literary arts organization), but just like her press she is focused on the work. In our email correspondence she wrote, “Mary Ruffle was once asked to write an essay about her experience being a “female poet” to which she responded along the lines of, I am?” (personal communication, 2017) So perhaps the distinction is not one worth noting.

Awst has a more traditional model with distribution deals that feed their books into

Amazon, Baker & Taylor, Target, Barnes & Noble, independent bookstores, and libraries. They support their authors through the entire publishing cycle and work to grow the audience for each work. The traditional approach allows them to spend more time with the author during the editing process and after the book has been published. The success of the book is seen as the success of Awst. This differs from other presses relying heavily on print-on-demand services. One would think this may affect Awst's bottom line, but due to the caliber of work and effort they put into supporting their work, Awst is a healthy and self-sufficient press.

Tatiana Ryckman recently released a book I don't think of you (Until I do) this year. If you have not heard of her or her press, it is worth a look.

meet the poets

Next in the exhibit, we want to take some time to examine the different artists, writers, poets, and overall creators, who have had a distinct influence on the small press of Texas. They have influenced either through their work, the creation of their own small presses, or through collaboration and community influence.

ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER

What can I write about Albert Huffstickler that has not already been said? He is somewhat of a mythical figure in the history of Austin, Texas and to not know or understand this would be a shame. Huffstickler was born in Laredo, Texas on December 17th, 1927. Once he moved to Austin, it would be hard to not say he influenced the small press scene. He believed in small press and small journals. He often published work, specifically poetry, in Lilliput Review, but he also had his own small press, Press of Circumstance. He spent most his days, according to friends, at Hyde Park at Quack's 43rd Street Bakery drinking coffee, writing poetry, and smoking cigarettes. He would walk across to Fresh Plus Grocery running off copies of what he had wrote. People have deemed him, "the bard of Hyde park" since he could always be found there. The

Austin Chronicle named him "Austin's unofficial, beloved poet laureate." Just from reading what has been written about Huffstickler, it would seem everyone has another epithet to add to the legend.

It is hard not to see him as a legend when individuals like David Jewell, a good friend and, at one point, a neighbor, have more stories than could be recorded in this little space. "Huff," as his friends called him, loved people and was a keen observer. If one needs proof, look no further than his poetry. It was often dismissed due to its simplicity, but that was what made Huff's work so formidable. It was real, like so many of the presses we have discussed. As Ric Williams put it in his eulogy, "He dazzled us with his depictions of dishwashers, the down and out, the waitresses and ditch diggers, the common human who wandered this rock alone in search of love and in search of home but in lieu of love, in lieu of home would accept a kind word or a hot cup of coffee, a caged cigarette or they would perhaps finally find a serene consolation in simply being alone." Maybe that is why he is missed whenever you bring his name up in the presence of those who knew him. His work focused on being alone and lonely and the desire to and fight against being alone and lonely.



You see, his name is brought up and there is a twist of emotions in those close to him; an almost undetectable smile matched with an even less detectable loss in their eyes. Individuals who knew loneliness and experienced its ebb and flow alongside Huff. Those who became just a bit more lonely on the day of his death. You can see this again in Ric William's words, "If he had an idealism it was of compassion; Saint Huff, smoking above his dark cup and laughing every chance he had."

Albert Huffstickler worked in the very library, hosting this exhibit, the Perry-Castañeda Library. Huff moved to Austin in 1964, and he began his library job in 1973, where he remained working until he retired at the age of 62. He even wrote a poem about it called "The Talkin' PCL Blues." This of course is just one poem of hundreds. Huff's priority was to write at least one poem a day, and if he missed a day, he would make it up. Of his published work, there are literally hundreds of chapbooks, some through small journals, small presses, his own small press, academic journals, and more. Jewell can still recall the time when he was running off poems at Fresh Plus grocery store and giving his chapbooks out to anyone who would take them; a wandering poet with chapbooks in his trunk. A lot of the work that you see published later can actually be found in the papers and things left behind from Huff to Jewell.

I am sitting at David Jewell's table, and we are talking about the small press history for this very exhibit. I tell him of course we will take anything of interest to add to the exhibit or maybe even the PCL's Poetry Center collection when he shows me a small, powder blue suitcase that looks like it's from the 60s or 70s (I am not good at dating vintage suitcases). I open the suitcase and Jewell asks what I can smell. I wait just a moment before I say there is some sort of incense and cigarettes. Jewell's reply, "That's what Huff smelled like" (personal communication, 2017). A heavy smoker, Huff was always writing with a cigarette in hand; at least that is how Jewell remembers him. The suitcase is filled with chapbooks that were never formally published, notes back and forth between friends who

doubled as editors, and even gifts meant to cheer up a friend who was at a rough point in their life. I had not heard of Albert Huffstickler before moving to Austin, but it was hard to not feel like I was touching buried treasure as I dug through this suitcase.

Albert Huffstickler believed in community, and more specifically a community for the downtrodden, the forgotten, and most importantly, the creative. It is safe to say that Huff is one of the forefathers of the Austin literary community, and one of the reasons that Austin became such a nourishing and supportive community for small press to grow and thrive. Huff has shown by example that different communities like poets, writers, artists, and small press can all come together to collaborate and support each other in creative endeavors. His careful examination of the human condition throughout his life and writings has shown that we are better united as one in the human experience, but also that the largest moments in life, like birth and death, are truly experienced as an individual.

Albert Huffstickler wrote his last poem in the hospital on Sunday, February 24, 2002:

Tired of being loved,
Tired of being left alone.
Tired of being loved,
Tired of being left alone.
Gonna find myself a place
Where all I feel is at home.

DAVID JEWELL

David Jewell does not call himself a poet. To him, the connotations that are attached to the title just do not quite seem fitting for the work he does, and quite frankly it is not. Jewell occupies a middle space in this history of small press in the 80s. He was neighbors and friends with Albert Huffstickler, and yet he was just published this year by Raw Paw Press with Ric Williams last year. The scene in Texas, and more specifically Austin, does not believe in a generational gap. When Jewell met Huff, he was youth himself; he was still making zines by photocopier and going



to punk shows. Zine culture of the 80s and 90s took pride in being on the fringe, just like the punk rock community.

Zines occupy a difficult space between art, poetry, writing, and magazine work. They started out homemade on photocopiers like Jewell's, and often utilized collage work when including visual art. As they evolved, illustrators and poets worked hand-in-hand to make zines that were not fully art, not fully poetry, and not fully magazine. They were inconsistent, messy, and perfectly exemplified the mindset of their time. It was chaos all wrapped up for non-capitalist consumption. This is where we find David Jewell, writing poetry, prose, and some things in between all packaged together as zines. So I guess, no Jewell is not a poet and yes he is. The first time I met him in his apartment, you could not look in any direction without seeing artwork. Some collage work, some painting, and later he allowed me to listen to some of his spoken word work he has done, which had been set to music. These artists or creators that occupy these liminal spaces really are not comfortable with any labels, and why would they be?

So I sat with David Jewell. We talked about life, our pasts, Huff, and small presses. We looked through his old papers and chapbooks, some of his and some of others. Each item was unique because some of them are probably the only ones in existence. Just like Huff, Jewell wrote and also made artwork to go with his writing. His music

is ethereal and sometimes funny. The works on display in the exhibit are part published items and part unpublished. Jewell has never had his own small press, but in the magical powder blue suitcase, you can see how he influenced Huff through the notes they wrote each other. Jewell has published with small presses in and outside of Texas. His commitment can be seen more as a commitment to small press rather than simply Texas.

In a sense, David Jewell is the example of how small press drives in a community. Small press shows a commitment to the individuals that comprise the creative community in Texas. They show a commitment to publishing work that large publishing houses honestly could not publish because of its ability to defy categorization. The difference is that small press is not concerned with marketing and the bottom line. They are concerned purely with the work, and large publishing houses will not take a chance on work that will not produce further money. The communities that small press supports also support it in return. Jewell is a little in the past and very much in the present. Generational divisions are not able to exist because the most important principle to small press' is producing work that you are not able to find anywhere else. David Jewell is kind, welcoming, and modest, but more importantly he is a talented creator, and that is the only label I will attempt to attach to his name.

ANDREW HILBERT

What a lovable weirdo. This is an exact phrase someone said to me when speaking about Andrew Hilbert. It is hard to not agree with the assessment when he has written titles like, Bangface and the Gloryhole, Invasion of the Weirdos, and Weird Meat. He has written more than these titles, but one thing is certain: Hilbert is in a league all his own. When the Austin Chronicle interviewed him, they asked him why he chooses the topics he does, and so the story goes. "When he was a boy, Andrew Hilbert asked his grandmother, Donna Hilbert a poet as well, how to write a poem. She said: Write whatever is inside of you. So Andrew wrote poems about



bones, blood, and piss. It would appear to have worked, since to see Andrew Hilbert live is to have an experience that is beyond entertaining. He has his own small press called Weekly Weird Monthly that he founded in 2013. Some of his personal titles have been put out under his small press, while others have been done by other local small presses such as Perpetual Motion Machine Publishing.

It would appear that we come back to the same problem that small press is trying to solve, publishing work that is not available in mainstream publishing. Andrew Hilbert's writing is gross at times, funny, and many other things. I think that is why it is so different, so few authors have the ability to evoke so many different emotions from an audience with their work. He is known for also putting on quite the show at his book readings. Regardless of topic or opinion, Hilbert is creating work that you cannot find anywhere else. He enjoys entertaining people, and that is why his books and his live readings have such a loyal following. Even Andrew's small press is committed to the strange and bizarre.

Weekly Weird Monthly has its name from a joke about small press. Hilbert said, small presses and small journals will commit themselves to magazines and publications that are supposed to be weekly, monthly, yearly, etc. Then, once they have established a publishing timeline, they are unable to follow through with that

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exact time frame as advertised. Most owners or chief editors are not solely working on the just their small presses. They maintain other jobs in order to support themselves, while their small presses make money to support the publishing. This does not account for the time and energy on the publisher's part in order for copy to still get published on time, and on a regular basis. So, Hilbert decided to make a joke of it and call his small press Weekly Weird Monthly. There is no guarantee to a time frame for published materials, as you can tell by the name, and for this reason the audience is never disappointed. Hilbert leaves them waiting for the next book.

Weekly Weird Monthly and Andrew Hilbert himself, both occupy a space that is part showmanship and part writing. This does not mean that Hilbert does not give just as much attention to craft and content as our other small presses, but like Timber Mouse Publishing and its slam poets, there is attention paid to stage delivery alongside what is on the page. Originally from California, Hilbert arrived on the small press scene originally in San Antonio before moving to Austin. He has noticed that the community is more closely knit than what he experienced in California and that is what keeps small press here in Texas. He has a History degree, yet like most of our owners and chief editors, he has turned away from the academic in search of something more original, something that is made by real people. Andrew Hilbert may be a bit macabre or downright gross at times, but it is undeniable that his writing paired with his stage performances make him an author to watch.

JIM TRAINER

Jim Trainer is the writer and poet who founded Yellow Lark Press, and runs a blog named "Going for the Throat." Like most of our writers, Trainer has a background in writing, but also acting and music. He created Yellow Lark Press out of a desire to publish his work the way he thought it should be done, after his first book was published by an outside press. He had a friend at the Independent Publishing Resource Center, and he saw a new path to do things his way. Trainer



feels, “you really put yourself into the book when you’re involved in its physical creation, you put your heart into it and it becomes an experience” (personal communication, 2017). Here we have a poet that is similar to the older small presses in the exhibit. Instead of relying on print-on-demand, Trainer is back at the printing press creating his own works by hand. This is a great to approach to Trainer and his work-they are an experience.

The name Yellow Lark Press comes from a moment in Trainer’s life that was bleak. He could not see himself in better days or getting any better, and a White-eyed Vireo appeared in the dead of winter. Trainer thought about the audacity of this little yellow-breasted bird appearing to him in the dead of winter and he thought about what a lark it was to see such a thing. He thought what a lark it was to think he would ever get better, and the Vireo slowly became a Yellow Lark and a press was born. Trainer always thought he would publish his own books, and after coming across a copy of Henry Rollins One From None, he was inspired at an early age. Writing for Trainer though is not just his passion, it is a necessary part of his day in order for him to function correctly. Just like Huff, he tries to write something everyday either for his blog or poetry. He also aims to publish one poem a month, which he has been keeping up with. For him, it is about getting everything out on the page to get some peace; an idea I

think a lot of creative people can associate with regardless of their medium.

Trainer has had the opportunity to meet and experience a handful of the small presses also included here in the exhibit. He has a self-professed love of Lit City Press and the work of its poets like G. F. Harper. He has submitted to Write Bloody Publishing, and admires their work. Timber Mouse Publishing has poets whom he enjoys and respects as well. The list could go on and on, and though his ideas surrounding the small press community may differ a bit, Trainer attributes this to the changing times. He asks the tough questions of, if we can do everything so much easier today, like self-publishing, create, write, etc., what is the point? And maybe more importantly, how does anyone get paid anymore? He is able to sense the change in the community, but also see that it is teetering on a precipice where no one quite knows what will happen next.

Trainer may see the future of small press in a precarious position, but that does not stop him from writing or producing work. Looking forward, he is trying to continue to manufacture his own books but wants to move the operation to the Austin Book Arts Center. He writes daily because he has to, and when asked what is the point? Trainer does it because he said he would, and he lives up to his own word. We can all look forward to more coming from Yellow Lark Press, and in the meantime we can tide ourselves over with Going for the Throat.

conclusion

The research for the exhibit culminated to narratives, stories told by those who publish stories. There are gaps in the research, papers that were never saved or archived, and small presses that have faded into history without anything to tell their stories beyond the stories they published. That is the point though. Small press in Texas has existed to tell stories that were being ignored by mainstream large publishing houses. In the beginning, presses like Naylor, Eakin, Encino, Slough, Wings, and many more

came into existence in an effort to tell the stories of Texans and the Southwest. They each believed that Texans had stories to tell and literary talent that was largely going unnoticed. Presses like Slough and Wings took it a step further to give voices to underrepresented groups like women and Chicano/Chicana writers. As time progressed, newer presses of today are still committed to the same goals.

The groups and voices being represented are evolving as the groups going unheard evolve. Presses like Smoking Glue Gun have a commitment to the LGBTQIA and feminist communities. Raw Paw has a commitment to publishing artists and authors from all different walks of life, but they also have a commitment to evolving content that does not fit the mold or fit nicely into a label or genre. Timber Mouse Publishing has committed to giving slam poets a place to bring the stage to the page. Then there are presses like Lit City and Weasel who are committed to not letting art forms fade like poetry and the voices of the indie beat generation today. Each have their goals in giving a voice to groups like women, people of color, and LGBTQIA, but they also have a commitment to their content and pushing the envelope of what counts as art, poetry, and everything else in between. There are poets and writers who have also influenced small press in different ways.

Albert Huffstickler is revered in Austin like the grandfather of poetry or the godfather of small press. It would be hard to ignore someone so prolific when discussing small press. He ran his own small press, but more importantly he was concerned with giving back to the community. Huff wanted to make sure that others had the tools to write poetry and publish as well. David Jewell knowing Huff, continues this spirit through the content he creates. A constant boundary breaker, Jewell is committed to creating work. Work that defies definition, genre, and label. He is poet, he is artist, he is musician. Jewell will claim none of these titles and that is why at the end of the day he is a creator, which is a common occurrence in the small press community. Those that defy boundaries are hard sells for large publishing companies, but for

small press they are exactly the original work they are looking for. This very reason is why small press today is still alive and well in Texas.

Individuals like Jim Trainer are keeping original publishing alive. He is hand printing the books he publishes through Yellow Lark, and that means that every item purchased from the press has a piece of him imbued in the object. Few publishers today can say they have foregone the print on demand craze to commit to original printing. He has a love of the community and the work it produces, yet he is not so short sighted to see that small press is on the precipice of a new era. An era that is unstable and ever changing, which causes anxiety for anyone in the creative and small press community. Then we have Andrew Hilbert, who has committed himself to entertainment, writing, and doing things his own way. He has connections with people across the small press community and enjoys the support that the community, while also providing it himself. He makes sure that audiences demanding the grossest comedy out there get what they want. Hilbert sees a hole in what is being produced, an original message to be published, and he continues to deliver the bizarre and entertaining.

Each of these small presses and each of these writers all contribute to an idea that those who do not have a voice still deserve to be heard. That even the strangest or most fringe ideas and content have a home and community to that they can look to for collaboration and support. The self made man is from Texas and that is a reason that small press is still alive. We have people from different areas and different backgrounds all coming together to produce something the likes of which the world has never seen, and then they do it again to produce something different from what they have produced before. Small press is alive and well in Texas, whether they are born and bred or they move in, small press is here to stay and you can look forward to one hell of a fight before it will ever leave.

--mitch cota

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